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## Veto Power: Institutional Design in the European Union

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of the single market in general and the financial market in particular. Each individual chapter offers insightful expertise on the development of sector-specific decision rules, interest constellations, decision styles and key players. In doing so, the authors provide both quantitative and qualitative case-study evidence. These insightful policy studies are complemented by two theoretical chapters. Arthur Benz compares joint decision making in the EU to four federal nation states. One of his conclusions provides a perfect motivation for writing (and reading) this book: the existing theoretical analysis of reforming joint decisions systems may have underestimated the dynamics of the EU's political system. Fritz Scharpf contemplates how his original article on the joint decision trap in the EU would have differed if written in 2011 instead of 1988. His emphasis on the powerful role played by the ECJ and the Commission reflects the results of many of the empirical chapters.

The task of this research project has been heroic. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that some conceptual decisions made by the authors deserve further discussion. For example, a joint decision trap is caused by a minority vetoing policy proposals which would be supported by a majority. But how do we identify the extent of a joint decision trap empirically? Katharina Holzinger discusses possible answers which range from failed policy and law proposals to 'generally acknowledged problem-solving gaps'. In fact, her project partners follow very different approaches to specifying problem-solving gaps. Related is a normative issue which flares up in some chapters, but deserves further attention in future research: what are the potential drawbacks of each exit mechanism? Phillip Genschel reminds the reader that in constitutional politics there is no such thing as a free lunch. Bypassing the intergovernmental gridlock via ECJ rulings or solving it by the Commission's power to 'nudge' governments most likely causes over-centralisation. Here, the book makes a contribution to the omnipresent democratic deficit debate without an explicit reference. In a similar vein, the three exit mechanisms discussed in the book have interacting effects. For example, lower voting thresholds in the Council decrease the agenda-setting power of the Commission.

Overall, this is a great and intellectually stimulating book which is going to be of benefit to a broad readership. The research question is highly topical. The sub-optimal policies implied by the joint decision trap target the root cause of any reform debate. The authors and the editor have done an outstanding job in presenting their research results in the form of a coherent and excellently structured edited volume.

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### **Veto Power: Institutional Design in the European Union**

By Jonathan B. Slapin

*University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2011, 196 pp., \$60.00, ISBN 9780472117932 (hbk)*

The title of Jonathan Slapin's monograph *Veto Power* echoes George Tsebelis's well-known *Veto Players* (2002). Slapin builds upon Tsebelis' work by adopting a similar institutionalist framework to examine the distribution of power in European Union treaty negotiations rather than in everyday law-making. In fact, as EU treaty negotiations are subject to the decision-making rule of unanimity, the institutionalist

prediction is rather straightforward as it suggests that the outcomes of these negotiations are controlled by the member states whose preferences are closest to the status quo; if not all negotiation partners are convinced that a change of the institutional rules is preferable to the way things have been operating thus far, the proposal will fall.

Slapin opposes this institutionalist approach to the most prominent theory of EU treaty negotiations so far: intergovernmentalism, with Andrew Moravcsik as its main proponent. Intergovernmentalism, Slapin asserts, focuses on the largest EU member states and suggests that they are the most powerful players due to the much greater amount of resources they command. As a consequence, they are expected to be able to impose agreements on the other member states, even if these would in principle rather prefer to maintain the status quo.

Slapin tests these claims by examining 228 issues from the negotiations on the Treaty of Amsterdam. His findings give strong support to the institutionalist position and little to intergovernmentalism. At the Amsterdam negotiations, the number of member states preferring the status quo turns out to be a much better predictor of the decisions adopted than a measure that takes member states' size into account. Particularly small states, like Sweden, Austria and Portugal, are found to have been most decisive in controlling the treaty outcome, with France only coming fourth and Germany and the UK featuring among the weaker member states. Going beyond the Amsterdam negotiations, Slapin adds a qualitative chapter that tracks the negotiations on two key institutional issues – the definition of the qualified majority in the Council and the composition of the College of Commissioners – from the early 1990s until the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. Again, this chapter confirms that any progress in these negotiations has been controlled by the member states most reluctant to reform rather than by the largest of them.

Besides the key institutionalist claim about the power of status quo inclined states, the book develops two auxiliary arguments. The first is that domestic politics matters for intergovernmental bargaining. The preferences of governments reflect those of their constituencies and there is some evidence that governments facing a more daunting ratification situation at home do better in the negotiations. Secondly, Slapin proposes a more general argument which suggests that veto positions in EU negotiations only attain their crucial importance once exiting the Union, or throwing out laggard states, is no longer a realistic option. It will be much harder for member states to defend the status quo if the others can realistically envisage moving forward without them.

*Veto Power* makes a convincing claim about the bargaining logic of the intergovernmental conferences that have been used to renegotiate the EU treaties over the last 30 years. Slapin's methods and data go into unprecedented depth to support the claim that member states with preferences close to the status quo have held a strong grip on these negotiations. Yet, at times, the book risks exaggerating the novelty of this claim. While Slapin rightly challenges intergovernmentalism's empirical focus on the large member states, Moravcsik's theoretical argument would seem rather more hospitable to Slapin's claims, in particular because he also assumes negotiation outcomes to leave all states better off than the status quo and concedes only limited scope for issue linkages.

Also notable is the absence of any reference to Fritz Scharpf's classical argument on the 'joint-decision trap', which in many ways anticipates Slapin's argument in underlining that high decision-making thresholds in multilevel political systems risk keeping them hostage to the least reform-minded member. Finally, the strength and relevance of Slapin's arguments would have been much reinforced if he had also systematically reflected upon some obvious challenging evidence. One example of such critical evidence would be the fact that at the intergovernmental negotiations on

the EU Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty few vetoes were brought against the reforms proposed by the European Convention, which operated under anything but a strict principle of unanimity. A second would be the opt-out that the UK and Denmark secured from the euro, while Slapin's logic seems to suggest that they should have vetoed it instead.

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### **Governing the Euro Area in Good Times and Bad**

By Dermot Hodson

*Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, 192 pp., £45.00, ISBN 9780199572502 (hbk)*

Within the EU, the Economic and Monetary Union stands out for its decentralised, deliberative and informal methods of governance. This book – with its succinct and competent analysis of the EMU's key institutions, special policy instruments, and new modes of diplomacy – will be important reading for researchers of European integration. This is the more likely in that the author studies the governance of the Eurozone not merely for its own sake, but in order to better understand its relevance for the future of new modes of European policy making. Could the governance of the euro area serve as a model for policy reforms in other fields too? Conversely, will the euro be at least sustainable without adopting more centralised methods of coordination? These and other no less timely questions motivate the book.

While walking the reader through the complex interplay of the drivers and limits of decentralisation and centralisation, and formalised power versus informal deliberation, the author develops a number of arguments in favour of the resilience of decentralised governance. First, due to its leaders' and employees' identity and socialisation, the European Central Bank is likely to remain a reluctant EU institution. That is, whenever centralisation threatens the ECB's mission of keeping prices stable, the bank will tend to resist the effort.

Second, the book forcefully argues that the mixed performance record of new governance cannot be explained by the inherent shortcomings of the decentralized approach. Rather, other factors might have led to the observed performance lapses, not least the formalisation of the Eurogroup which poses a challenge to powerful member states; the negative impact of domestic fiscal regimes on compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact; and the absence of credible sanctions supporting implementation of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.

Finally, similar considerations apply to the multi- and bilateral arenas of economic diplomacy. On the one hand, the book proposes that the lack of a unified representation in foreign affairs did not prevent the EU from acting as an influential ally of the IMF in combating the global financial crisis. On the other hand, while euro diplomacy in some of the large emerging markets might seem to be less successful than dollar diplomacy, this could be traced, for example, to China's domestic politics rather than to the organisational weaknesses of the EU's foreign policy.

While the above points are well-argued and supported with ample evidence, readers may find the book wanting for not living fully up to its promise and analyse the governance of the euro area in good and bad times alike. In particular, the book does not offer a detailed account of the impact of hard times. Surely, the EU's major calamities – including the vicious circle of the Greek crisis, and the severe destabilisation of Portugal, Spain and Italy – were unfolding only after the book was published.